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SUBJECT: DEMARCHANTH THE UN SECRETARIAT ON POSSIBLE
FUMIGATION STUDY

REF: STATE 50839

¶1. (SBU) PolMinCouns, accompanied by Poloff, delivered reftel points to Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs (A/SYG) Angela Kane on March 30. PolMinCouns asked whether the UN had yet received the findings of the UN team that recently visited Ecuador to explore the possibility of a study on the health effects of counter-narcotics fumigation (which relies on the chemical glyphosate) on the Colombian-Ecuadoran border. He emphasized the USG's concerns that such a study would duplicate the substantial work already done by the Organization of American States (OAS) and urged Kane to consider the complicated bilateral relationship between Ecuador and Colombia -- including the possibility that Ecuador requested the study for political and not scientific reasons -- before deciding whether to undertake the proposed research. Poloff asked whether DPA had considered how to fund the proposed study if it decided to move forward.

¶2. (SBU) Describing the background behind the UN's involvement in the glyphosate issue, Kane recalled that Ecuador had rejected the results of the OAS report when they were released because the OAS Secretary-General at the time was Colombian. She said that after persistent appeals from Ecuador over a four-year period, the UN finally agreed to consider the feasibility of such a study only if Ecuador and Colombia reached agreement on the issue bilaterally -- which she said occurred on 7 December 2005 when the two sides agreed to the study pending mutually acceptable terms of reference. DPA then dispatched a team of technical experts to Ecuador in February to explore the feasibility of such an investigation. Kane said the team had reviewed the work done by the OAS on fumigation, but could not confirm that the UN researchers had actually met their OAS counterparts. She said the team had yet to report its findings to DPA, but would do so soon.

¶3. (SBU) The A/SYG decried leaks by Ecuadoran officials to the media about the work of the technical team -- which she characterized as inaccurate -- but said she had kept in close touch with the Colombian PermRep to the UN to ensure both sides were informed of the steps the UN was taking. In that context, Kane acknowledged the point that highly inflammatory "facts" about the fumigation had taken root in the local population and that popular pressure was in part driving the Ecuadoran government's actions.

¶4. (SBU) Kane emphasized that the process was still at a very preliminary stage and that the UN had yet to conclude whether a study would even be worthwhile. If the technical team recommended a study, she said the next step would be for Ecuador and Colombia to agree on terms of reference. The UN

would not proceed unless the two countries had themselves agreed on the way ahead. Kane said DPA had yet to consider the issue of a funding mechanism for a possible study, but DPA official Carlos Vergara (who also attended the meeting) reported there had been some discussion of a donors meeting to fund the study if the two countries agreed on the way ahead. Vergara also said the UN was aware that the OAS would soon begin a second phase of its research into glyphosate, which he said would be taken into consideration regarding next steps.

¶5. (SBU) COMMENT: DPA seems to recognize the political sensitivity of a study on fumigation, but insists that it must respond to member state requests -- particularly when both sides to the issue have agreed that the study should go forward. If we wish to block this study should it go forward, we should ensure that Colombia raises objections at the appropriate time.

WOLFF